

Hello everyone,

With this written testimony I would like to bring attention to the decision that the Department of Health and Human Services has made to close the Oak Chapel Food Hub. A decision that will devastate the 20906 community. This should be a major concern for the county council when considering that the 20906 zip code is the most populous zip code in the state of Maryland with 70,000 residents, according to 2020 US Census Data.

As the Bilingual Operations Manager at Oak Chapel Food Hub, I have been in a position that requires me to remain attentive to the needs of the community in many different ways. Whether it be through data collection, monthly surveys, mass text messages, phone calls, and even personal conversations. During the pandemic, the hub provided food, toiletries, feminine care items, COVID-19 tests, and masks to the community. Also assisting COVID referral families with food deliveries and also to clients most immediately in need.

Our community is currently recovering from the effects of the pandemic, and we have been there to support them. However, a new crisis has threatened to make matters worse. The inflationary rise of rents, utilities, and all commodities, has become overwhelming to many families. The effects of this new crisis have been reflected in our data, for example in November 2020, our hub served 1,034 Households, 4,746 Individuals, 1,561 Children, and 437 Seniors. In March 2022, our hub served 2,553 Households, 11,077 Individuals, 4,628 Children, and 1,639 Seniors. Further, we served 16,886 diapers to families in need. Our numbers have more than doubled, indicating a significant rise in economic distress in our area.

From August of 2021 through the week of April 11, 2022, our Case Manager has attended 214 clients with different services such as Snap applications and recertifications, assistance with application and review of rental relief applications, The community has been assisted with applications and referrals to other organizations for rental assistance. On the other hand, they have been assisted with applications for medical insurance for prenatal care and Care for Kids, in addition to referrals with the Cheer organization for Maryland health connection applications, they have also been provided with information on where to apply for Child support, and mental health. The community has received grocery and metro food cards, as well as referrals for legal assistance. The CM has also assisted the community by filling out the application form for appointments to look for clothing at Interfaith Works.

How will the county evaluate the true need of our community when its presence disappears from 20906? Are clients in 20906 expected to travel further for these resources? Are mothers with young children expected to take a bus not only juggling their kids but large and heavy bags of food? Are elderly folks expected to walk another 30 minutes or pay for a rideshare? The Oak Chapel Hub has regularly had between 50 and 70 walk-ups in the past two months. How will these families access essential services without a hub in 20906?

These are questions that the DHHS has not offered any solution to. However, I will offer you all the results of this decision. If you close our hub 720,000 pounds of non-perishables, produce, eggs and bread will not flow into our community. If you close our hub 192,000 diapers

will not be provided to mothers of infants and toddlers. If you close our Hub 7,200 bags of food, and resources will not reach our apartment complexes. If you close our hub, 3,500 home deliveries will not reach 20906 residents that have access to no transportation or have housebound chronic illnesses. Without our hub, we can not assure that these resources will reach 20906 residents when all other hubs are currently operating at capacity. I hope the council can find ways to avoid causing devastating effects to a vital community in our county.

Thank you,

Kenneth Fuentes

Operations Manager

Oak Chapel Food Hub